

GORDON BURN PRIZE

Strictly embargoed until 10pm BST, Thursday 14 October

Hanif Abdurraqib wins the Gordon Burn Prize 2021

The poet, essayist and cultural critic Hanif Abdurraqib has won the Gordon Burn Prize 2021 for his collection of essays, *A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance*.

The Gordon Burn Prize celebrates the year's most dazzlingly bold and forward-thinking fiction and non-fiction written in English. *A Little Devil in America* was selected from a six-strong shortlist by the prize's judges, author Denise Mina; writer and poet Derek Owusu; novelist and short story writer Irenosen Okojie; and literary journalist and editor Sian Cain.

The Gordon Burn Prize is run in partnership by the Gordon Burn Trust, New Writing North, Faber & Faber and Durham Book Festival, a Durham County Council festival. The prize was announced by Denise Mina, chair of the judges, on Thursday 14 October at Durham Book Festival.

Inspired by Josephine Baker's words 'I was a devil in other countries, and I was a little devil in America, too', Hanif Abdurraqib delivers a meditation on Black performance in the modern age that reaches back through the lives of musicians, cultural figures, history and his own personal story of love and grief. Each performance in *A Little Devil in America* offers layers of resonance, both personal and political, whether it's the twenty-seven seconds of 'Gimme Shelter' in which Merry Clayton sings, or the magnificent hours of Aretha Franklin's homegoing; Beyoncé's Super Bowl half-time show or a schoolyard fistfight.

Hanif Abdurraqib was recently named a MacArthur Fellow 2021 and *A Little Devil in America* is currently a finalist for the National Book Awards 2021. Hanif's first collection of essays, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*, was named a book of the year by *The Los Angeles Review* and *Chicago Tribune*, among others. His previous book, *Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to A Tribe Called Quest*, debuted on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

On winning the Gordon Burn Prize 2021, Hanif Abdurraqib said: "It is a joy and an honour to even be nominated, to be in the company of such brilliance. To be a part

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of this award and its growing legacy means the world to me, and I am overwhelmed with gratitude.”

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Denise Mina said: “As a writer who has been deeply influenced by Gordon Burn’s work and breadth, it has been one of the great honours of my career to chair the judges for this prize. The longlisted and shortlisted books were of exceptional quality this year and it has been a struggle to choose between them. *A Little Devil in America* is written with verve and style, taking unexpected turns and focus to illuminate the artistic experience of Black culture in America. As a history of creators and the many contexts they navigate, it is simultaneously a joyous celebration and a crushing reproach. Extraordinary.”

Irenosen Okojie said: "Tremendous. A buoyant, galvanising celebration of Black artistry. A really important book for our times."

Sian Cain said: “*A Little Devil in America* is as uplifting, devastating, informative and profound a work of nonfiction as I can remember reading. If a group of readers was looking for a graceful word on Blackness, on music, on comedy, on dance, on performance, on maleness, on joy, on despair, on beauty, they could all be handed a copy of Abdurraqib's book and find it. I hope this win means more people pick it up and come to appreciate what a wonderful work of cultural criticism and memoir it is.”

The Gordon Burn Prize, founded in 2012, remembers the late author of novels including *Fullalove* and *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*, and non-fiction including *Happy Like Murderers: The Story of Fred and Rosemary West* and *Best and Edwards: Football, Fame and Oblivion*.

Now in its ninth year, the prize seeks to celebrate those who follow in Gordon Burn’s footsteps by recognising literature that is fearless in both ambition and execution. The works recognised often make the reader think again, playing with style or genre, pushing boundaries or diverging from the mainstream literary culture.

Previous winners of the Gordon Burn Prize include Peter Pomerantsev in 2020 for *This is Not Propaganda*, his study on the war against reality; David Keenan in 2019, for his novel *For the Good Times*, set during the height of the Troubles in 1970s

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Belfast; Jesse Ball in 2018 for *Census*, his fable inspired by his late brother; and Denise Mina in 2017 for her true crime novel *The Long Drop*.

Cllr Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet member for economy and partnerships at Durham County Council, said: "The Gordon Burn Prize is always a highlight of Durham Book Festival and this year is no exception, with an excellent shortlist and a very exciting winner. We are proud to host this prestigious competition, which champions dynamic and forward-thinking writers like Hanif Abdurraqib. This approach is also reflected in our own cultural ambitions, including County Durham's bid to be UK City of Culture 2025."

Hanif Abdurraqib receives £5000 and the opportunity to take up a writing retreat at Gordon Burn's cottage in the Scottish Borders.

Notes to Editors

For all media enquiries, contact Laura Fraine at New Writing North laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com or 07411 164837

The Gordon Burn Prize 2021 shortlist was announced on 13 August 2021. The shortlist is:

Come Join Our Disease (Faber), Sam Byers
A Ghost in the Throat (Tramp Press), Doireann Ní Ghríofa
A Little Devil in America (Allen Lane), Hanif Abdurraqib
Luckenbooth (William Heinemann), Jenni Fagan
Mrs Death Misses Death (Canongate), Salena Godden
Sea State (HarperCollins), Tabitha Lasley

The Gordon Burn Prize 2021 longlist was announced on 22 June 2021. The longlist is:

Come Join Our Disease (Faber), Sam Byers
Diary of a Film (Dialogue), Niven Govinden
A Ghost in the Throat (Tramp Press), Doireann Ní Ghríofa
In The End It Was All About Love (Rough Trade Books), Musa Okwonga
Klopp: My Liverpool Romance (Faber), Anthony Quinn
A Little Devil in America (Penguin Press), Hanif Abdurraqib
Luckenbooth (William Heinemann), Jenni Fagan
Mrs Death Misses Death (Canongate), Salena Godden
My Phantoms (Granta), Gwendoline Riley

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Open Water (Viking), Caleb Azumah Nelson
A River Called Time (Canongate), Courttia Newland
Sea State (HarperCollins), Tabitha Lasley